

To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which
emerge in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church;
to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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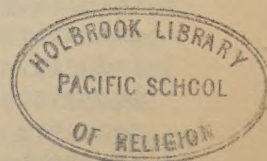
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THE CALL OF THE COUNTRY PARISH

By Kenyon Butterfield*



The country-side is calling for men. Vexing problems of labor and of life disturb our minds in country as in city. The workers of the land are striving to make a better use of their resources of soil and climate, and are seeking both larger wealth and a higher welfare. But the striving and the seeking raise new questions of great public concern. Social institutions have developed to meet these new issues. But the great need of the present is leadership. Only men can vitalize institutions. We need leaders among the farmers themselves, we need leaders in education, leaders in organization and cooperation. So the country church is calling for men of God to go forth to war against all the powers of evil that prey upon the hearts of the men who live upon the land, as well as upon the people in palace and tenement.

The country church wants men of vision, who see through the incidental, the small, the transient, to the fundamental, the large, the abiding issues that the countryman must face....

She wants practical men, who ... can bring things to pass, secure tangible results. She wants original men, who can enter a human field poorly tilled, much grown to brush ... and by new methods can again secure a harvest that will gladden the heart of the great Husbandman.

She wants aggressive men, who do not hesitate to break with tradition, who fear God more than prejudice, who regard institutions as but a means to an end, who grow frequent crops of new ideas and dare to winnow them with the flails of practical trial. She wants trained men, who come to their work with knowledge and with power, who have thought long and deeply upon the problems of rural life, who have hammered out a plan for an active campaign for the rural church....

She wants constructive men, who can transmute visions into wood and stone, dreams into live institutions, hopes into fruitage. She wants heroic men, men who

* By special request we are glad to present this statement of Dr. Kenyon Butterfield's which originally appeared as a section in the book, The Country Church and the Rural Problem, published in 1911 by The University of Chicago Press. This message from one of our early prophets has much relevance to many of our concerns today and reveals the dynamic nature of Christian rural life. Used by kind permission of the publisher.

possess a "tart, cathartic virtue," men who love adventure and difficulty, men who can work alone with God and suffer no sense of loneliness.

APPEALS FROM THE RURAL PARISH

This call from the country parish is one that may well give pause to men who seek to serve their country and mankind. There are numerous and powerful appeals coming up from the tillers of the soil, to those still undecided as to the life task. Let us name some of these appeals:

There is the abiding significance of ... agriculture and country life. The hungry nations are to be fed, the world's nakedness is to be clothed, God-given fertility is to be conserved. The forces of nature are to be harnessed by science and driven by trained skill. A fundamental human industry is to be fostered, an industry that supports gigantic railways, huge manufactures, immense commercial enterprises, stupendous financial operations. Scores of millions of American citizens are to be educated for life's work, their political intelligence and integrity are to be developed, their conditions of living are to be improved, their virtue is to be guarded, their ideals are to be enlarged. These people are to be served by state and school, by the power of cooperative enterprise, by church and the ministers of the Christian faith. They are to continue to send choice youth to the cities for replenishment and for leadership. These millions are to retain a place in advancing American life consistent with our traditions and our hopes.

The need of the church in all these great enterprises of rural society constitutes an appeal. Useless the wealth wrung from the soil unless the welfare of the soil worker be maintained. Valueless the material elements of human life unless the human spirit be enlarged. But vanity and vexation of heart are our farm labors and plans unless the spirit of service and of brotherhood is to dominate. And shall we partake of God's bounty without rendering to him our fealty? Shall the guardians of an ancient faith permit the Saracens of materialism, of worldliness, of love of money, of adoration of power, to capture the citadels of worship, and of praise, and of loving loyalty to all that is divine and eternal?...

The charm of the pastor's life in the open country constitutes a call. For this cause many are called and few are chosen. But for that man who loves the open, whose heart responds to the soft music of meadow and field, whose ear is attuned to the rhythm of the seasons, who feels the romance of intelligent care of soil and plant and animal -- to that man the rural parish offers rewards beyond all price....

The opportunities offered by the country parish for breadth of culture constitute a call not usually put down in the list of reasons for being a country clergyman. One does not need constant access to great libraries in order to acquire culture. Culture is appreciation of environment. It is a process of soul-ripening. Knowledge is merely the crude material upon which culture works. Reading is only one door by which culture enters. Close observation, meditation, pondering in the heart, much thinking are the favorite tools of culture. Do you desire time to read in peace? Do you wish for a chance to weigh and meditate? Do you like to stand close to men at work? Do you want to know the secret places of the Most High? Do you gain wisdom from the sermons preached by the rocks, joy from the songs of little rivers, peace from the evening hymns that arise from meadow and woodland? Then do not hesitate to seek these things in the country parish. From your rural watchtower you, also, may observe the swift march of affairs, keep alive to great movements, see the drift of great human tides. You may in the country,

Also, learn to appreciate the physical and spiritual environment that makes for the welfare of men and women, secure real personal growth, develop sound culture.

It is worth one's while to be in touch with leaders of thought and action. The stimulus that comes to the pastor of a large city church from such associations is real and vital. But for the man who can detect life's veneer, who loves to examine the fiber of character, who knows human nature, the country parish offers ample chance for interest and profit....

The very presence of the difficulties in country church work formulates a distinct call to men who like to conquer circumstances. The problem of prosperous church life in rural communities is not an easy problem. The successful minister in those communities cannot enjoy a life of ease. Vexation of spirit may become his portion. But the joy of overcoming an untoward situation may also be his. Some men will be attracted to the country parish just because it is a hard field.

The dearth of men constitutes a call. The fields are white for the harvest. Many laborers present themselves. But some of them come out merely for a summer's practice. Some have ancient implements. Some do not know wheat from corn. Relatively few deliberately mean to make these open fields their life scene, and fewer still have prepared themselves to harvest the crop by modern methods. Do not some of you see, therefore, a rare chance for distinction? A prayer for well-equipped harvesters is going up from all our countryside, and we wait impatiently for the response, "Here am I, send me."

To those men who have the pioneer spirit there comes a strong appeal from the rural church. For here is a chance for unique work, something different, and yet supremely useful as well as rare. Who will be our explorers, to blaze new trails by which other men may find fresh fields of influence for advancing the kingdom? No-where more fully than in the country can a clergyman shepherd his flock by day and by night, know the quality of their meadows, guard their water courses, lead into new and sweet pastures. The splendid opportunities for leadership in the country parish ought to ring in the hearts of young men of power.

The timeliness of a redirected country church work constitutes an appeal. There are large stirrings in all rural affairs. The fields are alive with movements for better farming, for more useful education, for cooperation. As never before, the country minister has efficient allies. The mechanism of socialization is busy; the institutions of agricultural education are pulsing with life; organizations are multiplying in number and in power....

The final and the supreme call from the country parish comes out of the gnawing hunger of men and women for religion -- religion interpreted in terms of daily toil, common human need, social evolution, justice, and fraternity. In country as well as in city, many men and many women are engaged -- often unwittingly or even unwillingly engaged -- in the sad business of living outside the pale of religious idealism, seeking to explain life on grounds of expediency, trying to find easy delight for the senses, expending toil and enduring sweat for that which is not bread. But all of them know, in their best moments, that underneath are the Everlasting Arms. Can we, then, afford to neglect half of our countrymen in our efforts to reach men effectively with the new evangel? Shall all these rising tides of life in our rural regions be left to break upon the futile shores of economic gain and personal pleasure? Is it a small and mean task to maintain and enlarge in the country both individual and community ideals, under the inspiration and guidance of the religious motive, and to help forty millions of rural people to incarnate those

ideals in personal and family life, in industrial effort and political development and in all social relationships?...

A PRESENT CRISIS

There is a new interest in American country life. The love of the outdoors is growing. Business men are recognizing afresh the fundamental economic character of the agricultural industry. The solidarity of city and country is seen concretely. The unity of national life is found to consist in developing both urban and rural civilization. Great movements are under way, designed to increase the fertility of the soil, to put agriculture on a better business basis, to educate rural youth to secure cooperative effort among farmers. Is the church also astir in rural places? The country church has been a saving salt in the development of our great farming areas; is she alive today to these new movements? Is she leading in the campaign for rural progress?

The most ardent friend of the country church must give a sorrowful "No" in reply to these questions. While many individual churches are doing splendid work, the country church as an institution is not awake to her task. She has not realized that wonderful changes are taking place. Science applied to farming is working a revolution in rural life as well as in rural industry. We are entering upon a new era in American agricultural history. But unless the church arouses herself, her peculiar work among country folk will not be done.

The present situation then is nothing less than critical. It is vital that the new country life movements be given a religious content. The leadership of the country church is imperative, if the new streams are to flow in the channels of idealism. Let the church assert its leadership at once. Let it set the pace for rural progress and determine its great issues. There is no time to be lost. The floods are rising. The day is at hand.

WHAT SHALL BE DONE?

What shall we do to arouse the country church, to give it its rightful place among the forces at work for solving the rural problem?

We must ask men to consecrate themselves to life-long service in the country parish. The country church needs men who believe that here is a great task, worthy of high devotion, thorough preparation, intelligent study, patient continuance in well-doing.

We must root out the idea that only inferior men can find a permanent work in the country parish. It needs our strongest and best men, particularly in these critical formative days of a new program for the country church. The issues at stake merit the leadership of great men. Let us do away with even the secret thought that a brilliant theologian has "buried himself" in some obscure farming community. It is his own fault if he remain buried. The seeds of the new rural religious life may be sown in corruption, in dishonor, in weakness; but, please God, they shall bear fruit in incorruption, in glory, and in power. We have a right to ask strong men to put their hands to this plow and not to turn back.

We must go out to the men now toiling in the rural parishes, with a message of cheer, of cooperation, of encouragement. They are a noble band. They need our aid. Let us help them to grip the new sources of power, to assume a new leadership to work together for larger ends.

We must appeal to the seminaries, and other training schools for preachers, to send forth men who have formed a well-grounded ambition to explore the resources of this great field and who have qualified themselves for the task -- who are well-armed for the campaign.

We must go to the colleges, and appeal to strong young men who want hard places, who love to take chances, who have withal the desire to serve their fellows mightily. We must persuade them that here is work that is epoch-making, a man's work, work worth while.

We must appeal to the heroic in young men. Let us not try to show that the country parish is a garden of delight, a place of rest and ease. Rather let its difficulties and puzzling problems constitute a clarion call to the men of heroic mold. Our fathers met every hard issue in the heroic spirit. They dared the wilds of an unexplored continent to establish a new kingdom of God. They carried the banner of the church across sea and land and planted it among savages. They kept the church in the van of the army of conquest that has subdued our western forest and prairie. Have their sons poorer vision, smaller courage, weaker wills? We may not believe it. But we must show them that here is really a man's work, that something vital is at stake. We must appeal to high motives, expect large sacrifices.

The critical need just now is for a few strong men of large power to get hold of this country church question in a virile way. It is the time for leadership. We need a score of Oberlins to point the way by actually working out the problem on the field. It is well enough to discuss the problem in its theoretical aspects. It is desirable to organize large movements on behalf of the rural church. But more than all else just now, we need a few men to achieve great results in the rural parish, to re-establish the leadership of the church. No organization can do it. No layman can do it. No educational institution can do it. A preacher must do it -- do it in spite of small salary, isolation, conservatism, restricted field, overchurching, or any other devil that shows its face. The call is imperative. Shall we be denied the men?

While we must demand men, single-handed and alone, to meet this call of the country parish, there are two powerful allies that we may ask to our aid. There is always stimulus in a common purpose. Is not the time ripe for a new "rural band" -- a group of half a dozen men from the seminary, who find adjacent parishes in a rural region, and there, quietly, cooperatively, persistently, grimly, study the situation, take leadership in all community life, incite the aid of school and Grange, stir lay support, carry on a great campaign for better individual and community life, and do all under the inspiration and guidance of the religious motive? A plan of this sort, carefully considered, discreetly managed, patiently developed, would form the nucleus for a new country church. It needs doing. It can be done. Are there men who will do it?

The time is ripe also for an organized movement on behalf of the country parish, that shall give dignity and direction to the efforts of solitary workers. The country parish is a peculiar field. New methods are needed. Men must be aroused from lethargy. A powerful cooperative enterprise must set standards, educate men, coordinate effort.

The country church is indeed calling for men....

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